Plan to power down NYC's polluting peaker plants faces delays due to Trump

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Body

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President Donald Trump's tariffs and energy policies are delaying New York's plan to retire seven power plants in the New York City area that are only used during peak-demand periods and emit a disproportionate amount of pollution.

The New York Power Authority wrote in a report made public Monday that the Trump administration had injected major uncertainty into the state's goal of transitioning away from fossil fuels. Shutting down peaker plants by 2030 is a key part of that goal - provided that reliable electricity service can be maintained and air pollution is not increased from remaining plants. But the report notes that delays to renewable energy projects, such as a large wind farm off of the coast of Long Island, are increasing the likelihood the peaker plants will need to remain in operation.

'The new administration has introduced new uncertainties into New York's energy security and clean energy priorities," the report states. "Threats to existing power imports from Ontario and Quebec, which make up the largest international power exchange in the world, were previously unimaginable but are real today. ... The pace of uncertainty in renewable energy and the electric industry continues to increase as the federal administration releases multiple executive orders that may impact how electricity is regulated, and how states may address climate change challenges within their borders.'

Gothamist reported last month that Trump's pause on new permits for offshore wind projects and withdrawal of federal funding for green energy initiatives were putting New York's climate goals further out of reach. Trump's trade war with China also threatened to disrupt supply chains and dramatically raise the cost of key materials used to address climate change, like solar power and wind turbines.

Trump and China earlier this week agreed to pause the trade war's harshest tariffs for 90 days.

State Attorney General Letitia James has also sued the Trump administration, arguing its halting of construction on a major offshore wind project known as Empire 1 was harming the state's climate and economy.

Peaker plants are power facilities that run only during peak demand - on the coldest days of winter or the hottest days of summer - typically less than 5% of the year. Environmentalists point to peaker plants as prime examples of environmental injustice because most are located in poor communities. Activists held an 'early retirement party' on May 3 for a peaker plant on the Williamsburg waterfront in anticipation of the power authority's report.

The report notes that five of the seven peaker plants are under consideration for conversion into battery-storage facilities when they are eventually retired.

The state's power authority wrote that further analysis was needed to determine when the peaker plants can be permanently powered down. According to Gov. Kathy Hochul's office, the state has closed down nearly 5 gigawatts' worth of fossil fuel plants over the last five years and replaced almost half of them with renewable energy.

But environmentalists said they were frustrated.

'They could be writing about how much renewable energy they need to build and are going to build to ensure grid reliability, to ensure that air pollution is going down, but instead they're giving a series of excuses and hand waves,' said Michael Paulson, associate director of Sane Energy Project, which advocates for a transition to renewable energy. " We can't wait another year. We can't wait another week. We have absolutely no time to lose.'

Link to the original story.

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